

ENGINEERING HERITAGE RECOGNITION PROGRAM

Nomination of Fort Denison

as an Item of Engineering Heritage Interest

Item Name:	Fort Denison		
Other/Formal Names:	Muddawahnyuh, Mat-te-wan-ye (Aboriginal names); Rock island; Pinchgut (colloquial name)		
Locality:	Sydney Harbour		
Address:	Sydney Harbour		
Co-ordinates	Lat:-33.85479061237717, Long: 151.2256553525629		
Current Owner:	NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service		
Original Owner:	Gadigal people		
Current use:	Historic site, a museum, tour destination and restaurant.		
Former use:	Defence fortification		
Proposed use:	NA		
Item Condition:	Good		
Designer:	Lieutenant Colonel George Barney R.E.		
Builder:	William Randle		
Started:	1841	Completed:	1862
History:	<p>When the First Fleet arrived in Sydney Harbour in 1788, Muddawahnyuh was a rocky island about 25 meters high. It acquired the colloquial name of 'Pinchgut' when convict Thomas Hill was sentenced to a week there and fed only on bread and water. A gibbet was later erected in 1796 from which the murderer Francis Morgan was hung, with his carcass hung in chains.</p> <p>Then in 1839 two American warships arrived unannounced in the night, which showed the colony was vulnerable to attack. This prompted a review of the Colony's defences following which, Colonial Engineer Captain George Barney commenced levelling the island for a gun battery in 1841.</p> <p>Because of fear of a Russian naval attack during the Crimean War, fortification of the island resumed in 1855, with construction of the Martello tower and barrack block. The fort was designed, by now, Lieutenant Colonel George Barney and was constructed by William Randle, with completion in November 1857.</p> <p>The tower's walls are between 3.3 and 6.7 metres thick at the base and 2.7 metres thick at the top. Fort Denison's armament included three 8-inch muzzle loaders in the tower, two 10-inch guns, one on a 360-degree traverse on the top of the tower and one in a bastion at the other end of the island, and twelve 32-pound cannons in a battery between the base of the tower and the flanking bastion.</p> <p>The fort took its name from Sir William Thomas Denison, the Governor of</p>		

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	<p>New South Wales from 1855 to 1861.</p> <p>The Martello tower is the only one ever built in Australia and the last one ever constructed in the British Empire. It was constructed of sandstone from Kurraba Point, Neutral Bay.</p> <p>The name 'Martello' tower is a corruption of that of Cape Mortella in Corsica where a circular tower of this kind was captured (only with great difficulty), in 1794 by British forces supporting Corsican insurgents against the French.</p> <p>With the threat to England of invasion by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1803, the success of the Corsican tower prompted the construction of 74 Martello towers along the English Channel coast. The French built a few of similar design, and others were built in the United States and Canada – around 200 in all. However, the advent of powerful naval guns rendered the forts largely obsolete, and this was the case with Fort Denison by the time it was completed.</p> <p>While Fort Denison has never fired a shot in anger, it has been fired upon by an ally! In May 1942, three Japanese midget-submarines attacked Sydney Harbour. When the US Navy cruiser USS <i>Chicago</i> fired on the Japanese some of its shells hit Fort Denison causing the tower minor damage.</p> <p>Following completion of Sydney observatory in 1858, firing of a noon-day gun to signal time to the town was commenced at Fort Macquarie, when the time-ball dropped at the observatory; the firing was later changed to 1pm. Firing of the gun later transferred to Dawes Battery and then to Fort Denison in February 1906. It ceased in February 1942 during World War II, resumed in February 1986 and the tradition continues.</p> <p>Tides have been measured at Fort Denison since 1857, initially using a bench mark cut into the stonework of the Martello Tower. Tide heights and times at Fort Denison are the primary base referent for published tide information for other places in the state of New South Wales.</p> <p>Fort Denison is now an historic site, a museum, tour destination and restaurant, under the control of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.</p>
Description:	<p>Fort Denison is built of sandstone quarried from Kurraba Point and comprises a Martello tower and barrack block; there is a landing wharf for vessels conveying visitors and goods to the island. The tide gauge for the harbour is on the island and is the primary base referent for tide information for the state of New South Wales.</p>
Significance:	<p>Fort Denison is of national significance as an exceptionally fine and intact example of a 19th century defence fortification that is unique within Australia. It was designed by Lieutenant Colonel George Barney, one of the most important colonial engineers, and constructed under his supervision.</p> <p>It is of international significance as one of only three towers in the southern hemisphere that survive intact, and forms part of a worldwide group of similarly styled and dated European coastal fort towers built during this period.</p> <p>Fort Denison is of state significance as the location of the State's principal tide gauge since the 1870s, and as an integral part of the Sydney Harbour navigation system from 1858, when the first navigational light was installed. The island was the location for the time gun from 1906 to 1942;</p>

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	<p>firing was re-introduced in 1986 as a tourist attraction, and has been maintained since.</p> <p>Fort Denison's defensive fortification, erected in 1840–62 is a direct reflection of the concerns of the British settlement in Sydney during the mid-19th century. There is a high potential for archaeological remains associated with both the construction of the fort, and the mid and late 19th century military occupation of the island.</p>		
Webpage Summary:	<p>In 1841, Captain George Barney levelled a 25 m high rocky island in Sydney Harbour for construction of a gun battery.</p> <p>Construction of the Martello Tower and barrack block on the island from 1855 to 1857 was prompted by fear of a Russian naval attack during the Crimean War. It was designed by now, Lieutenant Colonel George Barney and was constructed by William Randle. The fort took its name from Sir William Thomas Denison, the Governor of New South Wales from 1855 to 1861.</p> <p>The Martello tower is the only one ever built in Australia and the last one ever constructed in the British Empire. The fort is of national significance as an exceptionally fine and intact example of a 19th century defence fortification that is unique within Australia; it is one of only three towers in the southern hemisphere that survive intact; and forms part of a worldwide group of similarly styled and dated European coastal fort towers built during this period.</p> <p>Fort Denison is the location of the State's principal tide gauge since the 1870s, and has been an integral part of the Sydney Harbour navigation system since 1858. The island was the location for the time gun – that signaled time to the town, from 1906 to 1942; firing was re-introduced in 1986 as a tourist attraction and has been maintained since.</p>		
Engineering Theme:	Defence; Army; Coastal defences.		
Heritage Listing:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW State Heritage Register, SHR No 00985, gazetted on 2/4/1999. • Sydney Regional Environmental Plan (Sydney Harbour catchment) 2005, Schedule 4 Heritage item no. 69. 		
References:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fort Denison Conservation Management Plan. 2019. State of NSW and Office of Environment and Heritage. • https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Denison • https://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/things-to-do/historic-buildings-places/fort-denison-muddawahnyuh 		
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Pinchgut Island

SLNSW



Fort Denison from Mrs. Macquarie's Point



Fort Denison



Barrack Block, Fort Denison



Fort Denison cannons

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Cannon within the tower



1856 graffiti



Sandstone block key



Navigation beacon